

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Art  
REPORT**

**Seamount College  
Kinvara, County Galway  
Roll number: 63050T**

**Date of inspection: 7 October 2011**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	7 October 2011
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Resources have been put in place in the art department to facilitate students' encounter with various media and materials, co-curricular activities, and preparation for the state examinations.
- Very good use was made of information and communication technology (ICT) and video in the senior cycle history and appreciation of art lesson inspected.
- Students' work is monitored as it progresses and feedback is given. Evaluative commentary helps students to progress effectively through assignments.
- The school's strong emphasis on art-elements drawing and on teaching and learning of other basic skills needs to be augmented with stronger emphasis on creativity, self-expression and work from imagination rather than from secondary sources.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The breadth and balance of the Junior Certificate art syllabus should be central to the planning process, and the syllabus document should be used as the key reference point for developing course outlines and lesson planning in the subject department plan.
- As an enhancement of current practice, students' higher-order skills should be developed in parallel with art-elements knowledge in order to emphasise the development of personal self-expressive creativity.
- ICT should be further planned for as a resource for teaching and learning in order to extend current good practice and widen and enrich students' experience of art and design.
- The art department planning document should be developed by the addition of learning outcomes and differentiation and by attention to time management of assignments. It should also be further enriched and extended, strongly focussing on reflecting the breadth and balance in syllabus documents and on learning and assessment outcomes
- In order to address dwindling numbers in senior cycle Art the principal should support and monitor the further development of art department practices to ensure that an attractive learner-centred approach is actively pursued as a tool for sustaining viable numbers in the long term.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Seamount College is a voluntary secondary girls-only day school serving a wide rural area. The Transition Year (TY) programme is offered as an option. The principal is strongly focused in maximising Art for its potential in the academic, personal and vocational development of students. The school campus and environs provide a potentially useful environment for drawing and observational learning activities for the art department.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Art is being competently and conscientiously delivered with an emphasis on the art elements and on technical skills development. As an enhancement of current practice, students' higher-order skills should be developed in parallel with art-elements knowledge in order to develop personal self-expressive creativity.
- Students are given opportunities to encounter a range of materials and media. They clearly benefit from the teaching style and from the encouraging atmosphere of the art department.
- The classroom space available makes some 3D work challenging. A pragmatic approach is adopted and crafts that are accommodated best by the facilities are practised.
- Personal artworks by the teacher are displayed throughout the school. This is generous and highly praiseworthy as an effective way of giving students an awareness of art beyond the classroom context.
- Communication with students is good and featured thorough explanations. Correct specialised terminology, appropriate to the technical and aesthetic content of the subject, is used. While the vocabulary used is good, strategies to get students to understand, remember, spell and use words correctly should be reviewed and strengthened.
- There is a strong emphasis on art elements, and on drawing and colour work, in course delivery. Students have developed technical skills reflecting their aptitude and motivation.
- The starting point for image generation is heavily reliant on secondary sources. More primary sources should be used. Recourse to secondary sources should be limited and a balance between closed-ended assignments and exploratory, open-ended assignments should be achieved in students' work. It is recommended that teaching focus on guiding students' project work towards topics that can be developed from primary sources.
- While basic skills have been well learned by many, working from imagination and primary sources rather than photography or web-derived secondary sources was less characteristic of the students' work. Higher-order skills should be developed in parallel with basic ones, particularly for students of higher ability, in order to develop an incrementally increased level of autonomous, self-expressive creativity. It is recommended that this be part of plans to improve current practice.
- In order to facilitate breadth and balance in the subject, long-running class-based assignments should be infrequent. Assignments that adhere to stricter timeframes and that facilitate coverage of a wider range of topics and media allow students a richer and more useful encounter with art and design. It is recommended that, when students have understood the principles of the assignment and have made significant progress,

assignments be completed as homework where viable, thus freeing up class time for new learning topics. Planning for use of time, by term, can also support optimal use of available class periods.

- Students' work is monitored and feedback is given. Evaluative commentary helps students to progress effectively through assignments. This is all good practice and supportive of learning. Good assessment records are kept by the art department. Time management of students' Junior Certificate project work is efficient, and State Examinations Commission (SEC) examination criteria are used for monitoring progress.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Access to the subject is good and time is adequately allocated to it. The department budget supports a range of crafts, 2D and 3D work.
- The principal is attuned to the needs of the subject and values its educational role and developmental potential. It is recommended that management further collaborate with the art department to ensure effective realisation of that potential.
- Access to the subject is open and is provided in senior cycle on student demand. This year, numbers opting were so low in fifth year that a lone student was accommodated in shared lessons with sixth year, itself a tiny class group. In order that better take-up is developed in senior cycle and that the subject does not remain numerically diminished, a more vibrant, engaging and learner-friendly approach might be pursued to secure larger class-group numbers in the long term. The principal should support and monitor the further development of art department practices to ensure a learner-centred approach and an attractive learning prospect is pursued.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Planning documents were made available during the inspection. The art department plan provides a good starting point for further development. A focus on the artistic and aesthetic learning needs of the students should be reflected in the document as an expansion of the existing general-content plan. The current plan should be enriched by the inclusion of learning outcomes for students of all abilities.
- Assessment criteria used to assess class tests and end-of-term examinations should be based on documented learning outcomes in the department plan. In planning the assessment strategy, clear distinction should be made between assessment for learning and assessment for accreditation.
- It is recommended that the breadth and balance of the Junior Certificate art syllabus be central to the planning process, and that the syllabus document be the central reference point for course outlines and planning of lessons. Clarity about how syllabus objectives might be realised needs to inform planning for methodologies and outcomes.
- It is recommended that planning factors in differentiation for class groups. In developing a good differentiation and assessment culture, more attention needs to be paid in planning to the full set of syllabus aims and objectives. Any tendency to overemphasise examination criteria rather than syllabus aims needs to be addressed.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.